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HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL ADVISORY GROUP (OPAG)

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an historical review of the goals, activities, and accomplishments of the Office of Personnel Advisory Group (OPAG), from its inception in January 1972, as the Junior Advisory Panel (JAP) to its gradual and ultimate demise in 1981. Official OPNs, and relevant papers concerning the JAP/OPAG appear chronologically in Attachment A. Attachment B lists membership during this period as documented in OPAG's files, and Attachment C describes significant projects pursued by the JAP/OPAG, their recommendations and contributions.

2. Background

In January 1972, during the era of Agency-wide management advisory groups (ADMAG, SOAG, FINMAG, MAGID, etc.) designed to supplement established channels of management-employee communication, the Director of Personnel organized the SP (Personnel) Junior Advisory Panel, commonly referred to as the JAP. This eight-member group, assisted on an ad hoc basis by twelve additional resource officers, was composed of a representative sample of junior and mid-level personnel careerists, GS-09-13, whose primary function was to act as a sounding board for the Director of Personnel not only on issues affecting the SP Career Service, but also on Agency-wide personnel practices and procedures. An additional, but in practice equally important, function of this Panel was to serve as an effective informal communication link between SP careerists and the Director of Personnel. The Panel's newsletter, the JAPGRAM, first disseminated in October 1972, and published periodically, provided feedback to personnel

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careerists on the JAP's past and proposed activities, conveyed significant highlights from the Panel's discussions with the Director of Personnel, and summarized the monthly Personnel Officers Meetings.

Until 1973, the relationship between the JAP and the Director of Personnel was an informal one. The Panel was primarily responsive to questions posed by the Director rather than independently initiating projects or research. However, in 1973, because of the Director of Personnel's explicitly expressed interest in OPAG, and with the subsequent publication of the OPAG Charter September 6, 1973 (OPN 20-73-7), the Panel became an official entity and began to take a more active role in addressing personnel management issues. Because of potential derogatory ethnic connotations, the name JAP was changed to OPAG, and the JAPGRAM became the OPGRAM. Regular weekly meetings were scheduled, regular sessions with the Director of Personnel were arranged, and OPAG's responsibilities were more clearly defined. The Panel would consist of eight members, MP (Personnel) Careerists, GS 09-13, not over age 38, and with at least two years of Agency Personnel experience. A term of office would be for one year, and a new Chairman would be selected by the Group every three months. The OPAG was officially tasked with identifying issues or problems and initiating research on matters for consideration by the Director of Personnel. They were also to review current procedures in all phases of Agency personnel management and to make recommendations to the Director of Personnel in order to improve existing systems. They would continue as a sounding board for the Director of Personnel and perform other studies for him as required.

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The OPAG Charter was amended on 25 March 1974 (OPN 20-74-3) to remove age and experience requirements, in 1977 (OPN 20-77-14) to extend the membership term from one year to 18 months, and again in 1979 (OPN 20-79-19) to extend membership eligibility to all OP careerists, including clericals, GS-07-13. The Group was also expanded at this time from eight to ten members, and decided to hold their meetings on a biweekly rather than on a weekly basis. According to OPAG's Minutes, beginning in late 1974, occasionally throughout the years 1975-1977, and quite frequently from 1978 forward, OPAG members began to question the Group's function and necessity in light of other advisory groups within the Agency, and other areas within the Office of Personnel performing similar functions. Moreover, in the late 1970s, Personnel Careerists demonstrated an increasing lack of interest in OPAG's activities, lack of interest in serving on OPAG, and lack of credibility in the Group's clout with OP management. The Panel too often had to actively solicit topics for discussion or seek out problem areas from Personnel Officers in order to generate projects for themselves. Finally, in 1980 and 1981, the Director of Personnel was only able to meet with the Group sporadically, as he was faced with other significant Agencywide projects requiring his continuous time and attention. The Group began to meet once a month and then only when asked to do so by the Director of Personnel. OPAG had, in effect, outlived its usefulness. By mutual consent between the Chairman, OPAG and the Director of Personnel, OPAG was officially disbanded in July 1981.

3. Activities

OPAG's activities reflect timely personnel and management issues confronting the Office of Personnel and the Agency during the period 1972-1981.

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For example, in 1972 and 1973, the Panel reviewed Agency promotion policy and procedures, the Fitness Report, the Headquarters Reassignment Questionnaire (HRQ), the Position Control Register (PCR), policy towards females returning from overseas short of tour, the SP Career Service and categories therein, rotational assignments between the Personnel and the Support Career Services, and training and management development in the Office of Personnel. It also assisted in the selection of speakers for the Annual Personnel Conference. In 1973, OPAG studied the role of the Personnel Officer in the DDO, the competitive evaluation and ranking system, and the feasibility of establishing a Clerical Career Service. In 1974, it evaluated the applicant processing system from recruitment through EOD, reviewed the POT Program, and studied means of improving communication within the Office of Personnel. OPAG continued its research on a Clerical Career Service for CIA.

In 1975, the Group's major projects included reviewing the format and usefulness of the staffing complement, organizing "RAP" (discussion) sessions between the Director of Personnel and selected Personnel Officers four times per year, and studying the feasibility of establishing an Assessment Center for the Office of Personnel. In 1976, OPAG reviewed the IG Report of the Office of Personnel and discussed ways of changing the Office of Personnel's negative image. During this period OPAG expanded its study of Assessment Centers. In 1977, it continued in its efforts to improve the Office of Personnel's image, reviewed the Personnel Management Program Opinion Survey and published a list of OPMs and OPNs relating to career management. In 1978, a good portion of OPAG's meetings were devoted to an analysis of OPAG's value and contributions to the Office of Personnel. It organized an Office of Personnel Social, prepared an alphabetical list of topics OPAG had considered, assisted in the revision of the Annual Panel Questionnaire, and commented on the DDA Management Survey.

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In 1979, OPAG studied the feasibility of initiating an MP vacancy notice system, reviewed OPAG's accomplishments, published an updated OP functional directory, and contributed to the development of policy and procedures for selecting OP Careerists for conversion from non-professional to professional status. In 1980 and 1981, OPAG did not meet regularly, but only convened at the specific request of the Director of Personnel. The Group provided informal commentary from time to time on various topics under consideration by the Director of Personnel when asked, but did not undertake any new studies or initiate research. A list of OPAG's comprehensive projects mentioned heretofore, accompanied by a synopsis of each, appears as Attachment C. Although OPAG assisted the D/OP and Senior OP Management on a variety of other projects throughout the years 1972-1981, OPAG minutes did not describe these efforts in great detail. Some of these activities included: choosing films and speakers for the Annual Personnel Officers Conferences; assisting in topic selection for OP's Skills Sessions; providing input for OP's Management Objectives; and performing other duties as assigned by the C/Review Staff or the Director of Personnel.

4. Accomplishments/Contributions

OPAG's primary contribution was to act as an intermediary between the D/OP and OP Careerists, providing feedback to each on the concerns of the other. As is the case with most advisory groups, tangible results are not always obvious, but, at least in the early years, 1972-74, the Group appeared to have the ear of the D/OP and the credibility of OP careerists. The Group itself was very informal, as were its reports, minutes, and other studies. It served a useful function in the era of management advisory groups, providing a second uncensored opinion on personnel management issues under consideration by the DCI and by the D/OP.

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